**The Pulse: After the song, grating notes**



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Bob Dylan took the Pepsi challenge and won.

On any other Super Bowl Sunday, there'd have been controversy over Dylan's concession of beer manufacturing to Germany and phone assembly to Asia (as he asked that we let Chrysler build your car). But Dylan's surrender of American exceptionalism in a commercial escaped controversy because of the kerfuffle that surrounded Coca-Cola's multilingual sing-along. No matter that the song was "America the Beautiful"; the fact that it was presented in seven languages was six too many for some.

The reaction was immediate and, in some instances, vicious. CBS in Coke's hometown of Atlanta reported that the company's Facebook page became an electronic town square. There, a Minnesota-based church announced that it was throwing away all of its Coke products because "Mexicans singing the National Anthem is an abomination." Another user said that "it's not bigotry to demand that we have a unified language," and if we don't, "we are no better than the 3rd world cesspool dwellers that refuse to lift themselves." Videos of the commercial posted on YouTube also drew protests, including one observation that it was "sung by a bunch of foreigners." Time magazine reported that another blogger said, "We speak ENGLISH here, IDIOTS." Glenn Beck, fresh off a mea culpa tour, noted that the purpose was to "divide people."

No, the purpose was to sell product by striking a multinational chord on the eve of the Sochi Winter Olympics. Common sense dictates that before spending somewhere around $4 million per 30 seconds to air an ad that was seen by 111.5 million people - the largest in American television history - Coke would have run it by a few focus groups to ensure it received the intended reaction. I suspect the "great" Americans who were offended by it are a distinct and endangered minority who weren't the targeted audience.

Reaction to the 60 seconds is a sign of the times. Consider that 43 years ago, the iconic American brand brought us "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke," an ad that featured a few dozen singers in native garb who - in English - offered a song that was so well-received it spawned a commercial hit. Where last Sunday's commercial focused on America, the predecessor was globally oriented. But that alone doesn't account for its hostile reception in certain quarters. Much has changed since 1971.

Quick flashback: Richard Nixon was in the White House. The Colts beat the Cowboys in the Super Bowl, 16-13, on a Jim O'Brien field goal. Evel Knievel jumped 19 cars in California. The Weather Underground exploded a bomb in a men's room at the U.S. Capitol. Joe Frazier defeated Muhammad Ali at Madison Square Garden. Charles Manson was sentenced to death. Stamps were 8 cents; gas was 40 cents a gallon. The voting age was lowered to 18. Walt Disney World opened in Orlando, Fla. There was a prison riot in Attica, N.Y. Led Zeppelin released its fourth album, featuring "Stairway to Heaven." And Archie Bunker debuted in *All in the Family*.

Rob Reiner's "Meathead" character may have been smarter than Carroll O'Connor's Archie, but he never won the jousts in the Queens home they shared. And where whites were 80 percent of the American population, according to the 1970 census (which did not delineate Hispanics), Lionel Jefferson - Meathead's black contemporary - was a foil, never a threat. Politically, it was an Archie Bunker world, as evidenced by Nixon's 1972 clobbering of Democrat George McGovern in 49 of 50 states.

So, when a few dozen singers gathered on an Italian hillside to sing about Coke wanting worldwide distribution, it was more cute than a cause for alarm. But now the numbers have changed.

Six years ago, Pew Research launched its Population Prediction, noting:

"If current trends continue, the population of the United States will rise to 438 million in 2050, from 296 million in 2005, and 82 percent of the increase will be due to immigrants arriving from 2005 to 2050 and their U.S.-born descendants. . . . The non-Hispanic white population will increase more slowly than other racial and ethnic groups; whites will become a minority (47 percent) by 2050."

Never mind that the very first image of this year's Coke commercial resembled Ronald Reagan on horseback. The ad was received by some as an in-your-face reminder of changing demographics, rather than, as intended, a reflection of the melting pot that makes the nation unique. I doubt that a similar version with a unified language would have been received much better.

A release coinciding with the airing of the commercial read in part:

"For 127 years, Coca-Cola has been proud to be a part of bringing friends and families together while memories are made," said Katie Bayne, president, North America Brands, Coca-Cola North America. "With 'It's Beautiful,' we are simply showing that America is beautiful, and Coke is for everyone."

Singing "America the Beautiful" in different languages poses no threat to our way of life. No one comes here to change our country. If their intent was to change our country to be more like the one they've escaped, I suspect they'd choose the easier alternative and stay home.

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